DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 267 CS 501 077

AUTHOR Nykodym, Nick; Boyd, John A.
TITLE Expletive Deleted: A Study of Language Usage.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Chicago, April, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; College Students; Higher Education; *Language Usage; *Oral Communication; Oral Expression; Speech Habits; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Profanity

ABSTRACT

The research findings of profane language usage need to be extended so that more may be learned about human communication. In order to establish profane language usage norms, eighty-six university students were asked to estimate their profane language usage in each of three categories (excretory, religious, and sexual) in reference to three general social situations (sex relationships, friendships, and public-private situations) and three specific categories (same or opposite sex; alone, close friends, and strangers; and private, semipublic, and public). Results of the tests showed that excretory profanity is used more than religious or sexual, that profanity occurs at a higher frequency when a person is alone, and that less profanity is used in the presence of strangers than in other situations. (Tables of findings and a list of references are included.) (JM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED108267

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

EXPLETIVE DELETED:

A STUDY OF LANGUAGE USAGE

by
Nick Nykodym
and
John A. Boyd

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY-
RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Nick Nykodym
John A. Boyd

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING
UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL IN-
STITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRO-
DUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM RE-
QUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT
OWNER.

ICA CONVENTION
Chicago-1975
Interpersonal Communication Division

CS501077

EXPLETIVE DELETED: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE USAGE

Assuming that the principle reason for the use of language is to communicate, the study of profane language seems inherent in the discipline of communication. Cameron (1973) reported that in large samples of everyday speech every fourteenth word contained some form of profanity. Since a significant amount of language usage can be classified as profane, then it follows that by studying profane language and its relation to communication much could be learned about human communication. Thus, the objective of this study is to extend the research findings of profane language usage.

After reviewing the literature, it became apparent that a relatively small amount of research had been completed on profane language. The lack of research is probably best supported by Montague (1967) when he said:

> "Swearing constitutes a species of human behavior so little understood, even by its most devoted practitioners, that an examination of its meaning and significance is long overdue."

Hence, the objective of this study seems justified because of the high frequency of usage, its obvious relationship to communication, and the lack of extensive empirical research.

The related literature, although limited in scope, provides a starting point for this study. The Cameron study (1973) established the frequency of profanity. Baudhuin (1971) found that a speaker who used no obscenity had higher source credibility (dimensions of character and authoritativeness) than speakers who used either high or low obscenity. Bostrom, Basehart and Rossiter (1973) studied the relative impact of excretory, religious, and sexual obscenities. Their study revealed that sexual obscenities were the

most offensive, and that excretory obscenities and religious words were the least offensive. Mabry (1974) studied only sexual vernacular, but developed the dimensions of abrasive, technical, abrasive-expletive, latent and euphemistic. He found that abrasive and euphemistic profanity was used twice as much as the other three factors. Religious identification also appeared to have a profound impact on language usage. Females with strong religious beliefs used sexual vernacular significantly less than males.

Although some of the effect questions have been answered by previous research, the relationships between frequency of usage, types of profanity and the social environment has not been established. In short, empirical evidence of the social norms pertaining to the use of various types of profanity has not been investigated. This study represents a beginning effort to establish the norms of profane language usage in the hope of providing a normative baseline for future effect studies.

By answering the research question: What social situations are most conducive to the use of which types of profanity?, a set of social norms can be developed to anchor future studies. Once the profane language usage norms are established, the use of profanity can be studied in relation to attitude change, source credibility, small group behavior and other important variables in the study of human communication.

In order to answer the research question effectively, three categories were established in which profane language might occur. First, the general social situation was divided into three areas: (1) sex relationships, (2) friendships, and (3) public-private social situations. Within the general social situations specific categories of the relationships between individuals

were categorized as: (1) same or opposite sex, (2) alone, close friends, casual friends and strangers, and (3) private, semi-public, and public. The general social categories with the specific social categories within them seemed to make up the social environment in which communication and profanity occurs. The profane language usage was divided into the three categories of excretory, religious, and sexual already established by Cameron (1969). By determining the differences in frequency of usage per the general and specific social situations as well as the types of profanity used, the norms of profane language usage should be established and the research question answered.

Measure

Measuring profane language usage is a difficult task since many intervening variables interfere with the measurement in both the experimental and field types of studies. In lieu of a better instrument and to begin to establish the norms, a self-report measure was developed to start the research in the hope that more effective methods can be developed later to crosscheck the results of this study. The questions on the measure used a scale of usage: to a very little extent, to a little extent, to some extent, to a great extent, to a very great extent. The scale was pretested on twenty subjects and appeared to be clear and distinct to those subjects. In the completed measure, each subject was asked to estimate his profane language usage in each of the three categories of profane language (excretory, religious, and sexual) in reference to the general and specific social situations described earlier.

Design, Sample, and Procedures

The design of the study was obviously descriptive in nature as the design became a one group assessment. Students ranging in age from 17 to 25 were tested after being selected intact from classes that were representative of the University of Nebraska student body. Sex, major, and class standing appeared to also be representative of University of Nebraska students. The 86 Ss were tested at two testing periods with 43 in each group.

Analysis

The responses ranging from a very little extent to a very great extent were treated as a five point scale, and the means were calculated for each general and specific social situation as well as the particular type of profane language. Four one-way analyses of variance were used to determine the differences between: (1) the type of profanity used in the total population, and (2) the type of profanity per general and specific social situations. When a significant F occurred the Newman-Keuls multiple comparison test was used to determine the specific differences between categories (Ferguson, 1971). The alpha level was set at .01 to insure that the differences that occurred would be meaningful.

Results

All four ANOVAs were significant at the .01 level. The analysis of the types of profanity used by the total population indicated that the use of excretory profanity was higher than the sexual and religious types (see Tables I and II).

TABLE I

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: 3 TYPES OF PROFANITY

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance Estimate	F Ratio
Between	16.311	2	8.155	
Within	2476.763	2296	1.078	7.560*
TOTAL	2493.075	2298		

*P < .01

TABLE II

Q VALUES FOR NEWMAN-KEULS MULTIPLE COMPARISONS:
3 TYPES OF PROFANITY

	Sexual	Religious	Excretory
Sexual		3.24	5.41*
Religious			2.16
Excretory			

*P < .01

When the social situations were analyzed per types of profanity many differences occurred (see Tables III, IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII). Significant differences occurred between same sex and opposite with all three types of profanity with same sex being the higher mean. When the private category was compared to semi-public and public a significant higher mean was recorded in the private category on excretory and sexual. However, the only difference with religious profanity was found between private and public.

The use of religious profanity was significantly lower when the Ss were alone than when they were with close friends. The alone category produced no differences with the excretory and sexual types when compared with close friends. Also, no differences occurred when casual friends and

the alone category were compared. However, when the alone category was compared to strangers all three types of profanity were used less.

Between close and casual friends there was no difference on excretory, but religious and sexual were higher with close friends than with casual friends. Once again, a higher use of profanity (all three types) occurred with close friends than with strangers. No difference was reported in regard to sexual profanity between casual friends and strangers. However, a higher frequency was reported with religious and excretory profanity with casual friends as opposed to strangers (see Tables III, IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII).

TABLE III

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
EXCRETORY PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance Estimate	F Ratio
Between	165.90	8	20.7375	
Within	644.10	760	.8475	
TOTAL	810.00	768		24.469*

*P<.01

TABLE IV

Q VALUES FOR NEWMAN-KEULS MULTIPLE COMPARISONS:
EXCRETORY PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

	Strangers	Public	Opposite Sex	Semi-Public	Casual Friends	Alone	Close Friends	Private	Same Sex
Strangers		2.08	3.44	4.48*	5.94*	10.63*	12.40*	12.50*	13.85*
Public			1.35	2.40	3.85	8.54*	10.31*	10.42*	12.08*
Opposite Sex				1.04	2.5	7.19*	8.96*	9.06*	10.73*
Semi-Public					1.46	6.15*	7.92*	8.02*	9.69*
Casual Friends						4.69	6.46*	6.56*	8.22*
Alone							1.77	1.86	3.54
Close Friends								.104	1.77
Private									1.67
Same Sex									

*$P < .01$

TABLE V

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
RELIGIOUS PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variable Estimate	F Ratio
Between	101.61	8	12.702	
Within	720.39	755	.954	
TOTAL	822.00			13.302*

*P < .01

TABLE VI

Q VALUES FOR NEWMAN-KEULS MULTIPLE COMPARISONS:
RELIGIOUS PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

	Strangers	Public	Semi-Public	Casual Friends	Opposite Sex	Alone	Private	Same Sex	Close Friends
Strangers		2.18*	4.27*	5.70*	5.70*	7.40*	9.10*	9.49*	18.69*
Public			2.09	3.51	3.51	5.22*	6.93*	8.92*	16.51*
Semi-Public				1.42	1.42	3.13	4.84	6.83*	14.42*
Casual Friends					0.00	1.71	3.42	5.40*	12.00*
Opposite Sex						1.71	3.42	5.40*	12.00*
Alone							1.71	3.70	11.29*
Private								1.99	9.58*
Same Sex									7.59*
Close Friends									

*P < .01

TABLE VII

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
SEXUAL PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Variance Estimate	F Ratio
Between	228.749	8	36.094	
Within	596.010	757	.787	
TOTAL	824.760	765		45.844*

*P<.01

TABLE VIII

Q VALUES FOR NEWMAN-KEULS MULTIPLE COMPARISONS:
SEXUAL PROFANITY IN 9 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

	Strangers	Public	Opposite Sex	Semi-Public	Casual Friends	Alone	Close Friends	Private	Same Sex
Strangers		1.35	2.92	3.3	4.48	9.06*	11.67*	11.98*	14.27*
Public			1.56	1.98	3.13	7.71*	10.31*	10.63*	12.92*
Opposite Sex				.42	1.56	6.15*	8.75*	9.06*	11.35*
Semi-Public					1.15	5.73*	8.33*	8.65*	10.94*
Casual Friends						4.58	7.19*	7.5*	9.79*
Alone							2.60	2.92	5.21*
Close Friends								.31	2.60
Private									2.29
Same Sex									

*$p < .01$

Discussion

The results of the study seem to be clear as the analysis did not produce any contradictory results. The higher frequency of excretory profanity across all social situations establishes the first social norm that (1) excretory profanity, in general, is used more than religious or sexual. Another norm can be established from the private and alone categories. (2) Profanity occurs at a higher frequency when a person is by himself and/or in private. The third norm is (3) less profanity is used in the presence of strangers than other social situations.

These three norms plus the specific instances found in the results seem to answer the research question and, hopefully, will provide a normative baseline for future effect studies. However, some qualifications must be placed on this study since it was a beginning effort. First, the population investigated was comprised of college students, which not only limits the generalizability of the norms to college students, but those of a specific age group. Thus, the study should be replicated with other age and occupational groups for final confirmation of the norms. Also, a regional qualification must be placed on the results since only University of Nebraska students were included in the population. Second, the measure was self-report and many forms of error could have occurred. Although several protection methods were used (high alpha level and a large N), the results should be cross-checked with another type of measure.

With the two qualifications in mind and replication called for, the objective of this study still seems to be accomplished: that of establishing profane language norms for research purposes. In fact, several research

projects can be developed from the establishment of the norms in this study. One idea would be to investigate the effect on attitude change when one or more of the norms are violated. Also, the specific effect on source credibility could be substantiated as an extension of the Baudhuin (1971) study. Another possible investigation would be the effect on small group behavior when the norms are violated or reinforced. Many other research questions could be asked and answered about communication and its relation to the absence or presence of profanity.

Probably more important, the hope of this project was to stimulate research on profane language, and if the establishment of the social norms developed in this study does generate more research, then this study has been successful.

REFERENCES

Baudhuin, E. S., "Obscene Language and Source Credibility: An Experimental Study." Paper presented at International Communication Association Convention, Phoenix, Arizona, 1971.

_____, "Obscene Language and Evaluative Response: An Empirical Study." Psychological Reports, 1973, 32, 399-402.

Bostrom, R. N., Baseheart, J. R., and Rossiter, C. M., "The Effects of Three Types of Profane Language in Persuasive Messages." Journal of Communication, 1973, 23, 461-475.

Cameron, P., "Frequency of Profanity Usage," in Bostrom, R. N., Baseheart, J. R. and Rossiter, C. M., "The Effects of Three Types of Profane Language in Persuasive Messages." Journal of Communication, 1973, 23, 461-475.

_____, "Frequency and Kinds of Words in Various Social Settings, or What the Hell's Going On?", Pacific Sociological Review, 1969, 12, 101-104.

Ferguson, G. A., Statistical Analysis in Psychology and Education, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971.

Mabry, E. A., "A Multivariate Investigation of Profane Language," paper presented at International Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, 1974.

Montagu, A., The Anatomy of Swearing. (New York: MacMillan), 1967.

Rothwell, J. D., "Verbal Obscenity: Time for Second Thoughts." Western Speech, 1971, 231-242.